DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 220 777 CG 016 184

AUTHOR Bender, Robert C.
TITLE Experiential Awareness of the Effects of Test Score Reports.
PUB DATE 20 Mar 82
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Personnel and Guidance Association (Detroit, MI, March 17-20, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Congruence (Psychology); Counseling Techniques; *Counselor Attitudes; *Counselor Educators; Counselors; *Counselor Training; *Emotional Response; *Empathy; Experiential Learning; Higher Education; *Intelligence Tests; Motivation; Self Esteem

ABSTRACT

Because most counselors have experienced a significant amount of success, they often have difficulty understanding the impact of test scores on persons who do not perform well. Counselor educators must develop experiential awareness in an area normally outside the realm of their students. To provide such an experience, 25 counselor trainees took an intelligence test, the Otis Quick-Scoring Mental Ability Test: Gamma Test: Form Fm. All were given bogus results indicating they had the lowest IQ score in the class. The students were hurt, embarrassed and devalued, and experienced great relief upon learning that the experience was a hoax. The cognitive dissonance of receiving a score inconsistent with their self-image produced psychological discomfort and also a feeling of empathy for those who truly fail. Counselor educators who replicate this activity will need to exercise the emotional sensitivity to their students that they wish to develop in their students. (JAC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED220777

EXPERIENTIAL AWARENESS OF THE EFFECTS OF TEST SCORE REPORTS

Robert C. Bender
School of Education
Auburn University at Montgomery
Montgomery, Alabama 36193

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Robert C. Bender

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG 016184

AMERICAN PERSONNEL AND GUIDANCE ASSOCIATION
Detroit, Michigan
March 20, 1982

EXPERIENTIAL AWARENESS OF THE EFFECTS OF TEST SCORE REPORTS

Professional counselors are often called upon to make use of and understand a variety of data derived from standardized tests. Counselor Education programs, in recognition of the need for skill in this area, require that students become proficient in the selection, administration and interpretation of assessment tools. Counselor Educators are charged with the responsibility of providing an adequate conceptual and experiential base for their students which will insure that test data is used in the most helpful fashion with clients. Because most graduate students have experienced a significant amount of success (or they wouldn't be able to get into graduate school) when it comes to test performance, they often have difficulty in truly understanding the kind of impact that test scores can have on the testee who does not perform well. Counselor Educators typically review all of the data supporting the need to be sensitive to the psychological and emotional impact of test scores. Without the experiential base which allows the counselor to identify with the client, however, professionals often have very little appreciation for how test reporting is <u>experienced</u> by clients who perform in a manner that is not congruent with their self-image.

Counselor Educators thus face a very difficult task: developing a personalized, experiential awareness in an area which is ordinarily outside the realm of their students. The effort described in this paper grew out of a recognition for prospective counselors to be provided with just such experiences.

Method

Twenty-five students were enrolled in the basic graduate course designed to prepare prospective counselors to effectively utilize data from standardized instruments (CED 633, Analysis of the Individual). The initial portion of the course is designed to develop the conceptual understandings needed to comprehend the construction, analysis, reliability, validity and interpretation of tests. Students were well grounded in the statistical concepts which help to determine the degree of confidence that can be placed in any one test score. When the class was ready to move into the area on aptitude testing, the Instructor explained to the class that it might be helpful to them to have the actual experience of taking an IQ test and receiving the results. While there was some apprehension and some minor grumbling* the students generally accepted this as an appropriate experience in their graduate training.

The following week the Instructor administered the Otis Quick-Scoring Mental Ability Test: Gamma Test: Form Fm, designed for use with high school and college populations. The choice of this instrument was based on several factors: the test is self-administering, time allotment is a maximum of 30 minutes, the test is designed "to measure mental ability--thinking power or the degree of maturity of the mind," (Otis, 1954, p. 1) and raw scores are readily converted to IQ scores. The test was administered in strict accordance with the instructions in the manual. All test booklets with attached

*It is interesting to see graduate students who are teachers respond to the announcement of a test in the same way their students respond.

answer sheets were collected and placed in a large envelope which was subsequently sealed. Unknown to the students at this time, the envelope was never opened, and the tests were never scored.

During the subsequent week the Instructor prepared a "bogus" distribution of scores for the class, and made copies for each student. This form showed a rank-ordering of all raw scores and the corresponding conversions. IQ scores ranged in relatively equal intervals from 94 up to 141, with a mean of 123. The Instructor also prepared an official looking "Score Report" form which included the name of the test, the name of the testee, the date of the test, the raw score, and the corresponding converted IQ. A separate form was completed for each student in the class and sealed in an envelope with the student's name typed on the outside. These forms were completed so that every testee received an IQ of 94, a score that appeared in the "bogus" distribution only once.

At the next class period the Instructor reviewed the previous test-taking experience. Emphasis was placed on the nature of the instrument and the information that the test publisher purports to be revealed in the scores. The distribution of scores was given to students, and a lengthy discussion took place regarding the meaning of scores. It was emphasized that there was indeed a wide range of performance, but that no one had scored below the "average" range. The Instructor then gave each student a sealed envelope containing a "personal" report. The Instructor stressed the confidentiality of all scores, and repeated the usual admonitions regarding the necessity for privacy.

Many students proceeded to open the envelope, while others chose to hold theirs up to the light to see through the envelope, and some chose not to

examine the results in any way, placing the report in a purse or notebook. The Instructor then began to lecture on the meaning of test scores in the following manner: "There is no doubt that we can design a standardized test that is very accurate in predicting classroom performance. There is more than ample research which indicates the validity of such efforts. What we often fail to take into consideration, however, is the impact that a particular test score has upon someone who receives their own test score.... For example, would the person who received the IQ score of 94 please indicate by raising your hand?" As previously indicated, everyone had received an IQ score of 94, so all 25 students were eligible to respond as requested. One student did, another followed, and finally about one-third of the class had responded. It was then immediately explained to the class that obviously the Instructor had tricked them, since the distribution contained only <u>one</u> IQ of 94. The Instructor explained that none of the tests had ever been taken out of the envelope, and none of the tests had ever actually been scored. A lengthy discussion followed in which students were encouraged to express their feelings regarding this experience. The following week, students were asked to describe in writing the personal impact of this experience.

<u>Results</u>

For purposes of this paper the responses will be presented from two perspectives: the experience of receiving an IQ score of 94, and the experience of learning that the IQ score they received was "bogus". The following excerpts from written responses are representative of the experiences upon receipt of the score:

1. I had in my hand the breakdown of the scores for several

minutes before I received the envelope containing my score. I noticed immediately, of course, that somebody in the class had scored only 94, and I felt really sorry for that person. I knew that 94 was "average", but it's low average, and I was really surprised that anyone in a graduate class would have an IQ that low. At this point I was expecting my own score to be at least the middle of the distribution, if not higher. Then I got my envelope. Without opening it, I could see through it that my score was the 94, and it was really a shock!

2. At first I was so shocked I just couldn't believe it. I just knew there had to be a mistake and this couldn't be my score. I knew that I used to have real ability, but I quickly began to wonder about now. It had been nearly ten years since I had been in any college classes. And during that time I hadn't done much that was academically stimulating.

So I began to reconcile myself to the fact that it was my true score. I thought I'd really dig in and study and try to do my best in this class and see if I could possibly make a "C" grade. I thought if I couldn't, I'd quit, of course, and never try college classes again.

3. There was a chain of reaction--when I first received the score and saw it was the lowest, I told myself that it certainly was not an indicator of true IQ--that my intelligence was not open to question--all the time feeling acute embarrassment that I had rated the lowest. I even looked around the class and just knew I had more intelligence or a higher IQ than this particular person, or that particular person!

4. When we received the distribution sheet, I was disappointed that anyone in the class had received as low as 94. The girl next to me turned and said, "I bet I'm the 94," to which I, of course, replied, "No, I'm probably the 94." Of course, neither of us really believed what we were saying.

When we got the score report, I decided not to open it right away. Then I discovered that I could read the report through the envelope. When I saw the 94 I was horribly shocked. Being a 94 was bad, but being in the very last place in the class was much worse. I thought, I surely am as smart as most of these people. Then I began wondering what on earth I was doing teaching school children when I knew so little myself. It wasn't fair. I must get into some profession where I can't do as much damage to young, eager minds. Why was I in graduate school? I couldn't compete on the graduate level with a 94 IQ!

My competitiveness and self-confidence was completely drained. All this time, I had considered myself to be a rather intelligent human being, and now I was finding out I was "more dumb than smart."

5. My reaction to the score was first of all disbelief, then embarrassment because I have been making good grades and thought the instructor would not be able but to remember I had the lowest score (embarrassed about anticipated condescension).

6. When I looked at my IQ score, I immediately felt the blood rushing to my face. I knew everyone was going to ask what I made, and I was thinking about how I was going to get around telling them. I had this horrible feeling knot in the pit of my stomach and kept

thinking over and over, "You dummy, you dummy." After thinking about it for a while, I started to get angry--angry that one IQ test says I'm a dummy, knowing all the while that I'm a capable person and always made excellent grades in school.

7. I felt the tears surging and my throat was dry--numerous reactions passed through my mind. At first I decided I would leave at break and quit school the following day. After all, how could I possibly make it through graduate school knowing my IQ was 94 when I was already feeling pressure carrying 16 hours thinking I was fairly intelligent. Then I thought about some of the EMR children I have worked with--some of whom are so socially advanced that you have no idea they have problems until you work with them. It made me aware of what a frustrating struggle they must have--how could they possibly develop any self-esteem and a sense of worth.

8. My first reaction upon receiving my score was to check to see where it fell on the scale. Needless to say, when I realized that it was the lowest, I was terribly hurt. At first I thought there had to be a mistake because I had felt very good about the test, thinking I had done well during the whole week that elapsed between administration and results. However, after observing the reactions of a couple of my classmates, I began to feel that the score was correct (some smiles, but the majority showed no reaction, which was just the opposite of what I had done. It was obvious to the other members sitting at the table with me, that I had received a low rating).

After convincing myself that the score was true, I began to wonder if I should drop the course or even drop out of graduate

school. I began to wonder how I had made it as far as I had. Knowing me as I do, I realized that my personality couldn't have brought me along alone.

I was ashamed to admit that I had the 94 when the question was asked. I was hurt, disgusted, disappointed, and terribly let down. Not once did I doubt the validity or reliability of the test, even though I wasn't familiar with it.

Further evidence of the power of this exercise is evident in a review of representative comments that students made regarding their reaction to learning they had received a bogus IQ score:

1. My reaction to finding out the truth was one of relief. I think I was a little angry at the teacher for letting me think I was the only person in the class who made a "94" on the test.

2. Then the realization of it not being my true score came and I was greatly relieved but still somewhat shaken by it all. It did strange things for my mind to have this experience but I think it was good because it provided an opportunity for me to really think about myself.

3. I raised my hand only because I trusted you, but it was still hard to do. At first I felt relieved that I was not at the bottom - then horrified that people do have that experience - often repeatedly - with no relief "because it wasn't true." The minutes I felt are years of experience for some. No other way can I imagine how it would feel without this experience. Hope I don't forget.

4. After being informed it was a hoax, I first experienced

a deep sense of relief - then a nagging suspicion that if it were graded I might have actually rated that low, and I started rationalizing as to why it might have happened that way - next, came an intense anger at having been tricked and a feeling of disillusionment and lack of faith - that just wasn't genuine!

5. When we all discovered that we all had made a 94, there was quite a feeling of relief. I'm very glad to have had this experience, because I think now I can really empathize with persons really in this situation. It was a degrading and painful experience, and it really makes me question the humaneness and the usefulness of I.Q. tests.

6. I can't describe the sense of overwhelming relief that hit me when I realized that everyone's envelope contained the same grade. I still felt (and do now) uncertain about how well I actually did. I wonder if I'll ever be comfortable giving tests again?

7. I must say the whole episode was an experience I'll never forget and the pain and agony I went through for about 5 minutes was entirely worth it. I also don't think there was anything cruel in your using this little experience. I don't suppose too many of us in this classroom have failed too much in classroom and testing experiences. I think the experience would therefore help us all be a little more empathic with those we will be counseling.

Discussion

The students' comments indicate quite clearly the power of this exper-

ience. Our culture places so much importance on intelligence and the validity of testing devices that one simple 30-minute testing is sufficient to call into question the experiences of a lifetime. The magic of an "IQ" score is such that people invest a great deal of confidence and authority in numbers. But not only do people invest confidence, they invest value. As the participants in this exercise clearly indicate, they were hurt, embarrassed, degraded and devalued by the knowledge that their IQ was "only" 94. It must be remembered that these graduate students were misinformed for a maximum of five minutes. Most people who receive a score that is damaging to their self-concept carry that information for a lifetime. It may be easy for those of us who have never experienced receiving a low IQ score to maintain that it is beneficial for students to have some indication of their "true" ability. But unless we fully understand the impact of such information, we cannot be assured that the recipient will profit from knowing.

It might be argued that the devastating impact was due to the fact that these were mature students who had no reason to expect a low score. The receipt of a score report indicating an IQ of 94 was inconsistent with the way these students perceived themselves. This cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) produces the psychological discomfort experienced by the participants. A correlary of this position would be that some score recipients simply have confirmation of previous perceptions. Thus, these students do not experience the cognitive dissonance and consequent psychological discomfort. Low score reports would therefore not be devastating under these conditions.

The difficulty with this position relates to two factors. This argument ignores the fact that everyone who receives a score report must have

a first time. While the score recipient may not have developed expectations of scoring high, it can reasonably be assumed that they have probably not developed an expectation of a low score either. The second factor diluting the significance of the cognitive dissonance argument is that IQ scores are inextricably value laden. High IQ scores tend to be equated with high value, and low IQ scores tend to be equated with low value. Unfortunately, the value orientation placed on the IQ score often generalizes into a value orientation for the person. Consequently, the ultimate impact of low scores is experienced for almost all testees, irrespective of whether or not the score is consistent with existing self-precepts.

It is also likely that the specific long-term effects of receiving a low score report would not be as devastating as they appear initially. Students who were given sufficient time could be expected to modify their interpretations of the significance of their scores. We would expect these people to gradually place their score into a more objective perspective, calling on their previous success experiences to dilute the significance and question the validity of this new information. It is unlikely, however, that people who receive low scores ever completely overcome the personal doubts and apprehensions.

It is quite evident from the students' comments that this was a very intense emotional experience. The emotions and reactions evoked were stronger than the Instructor had anticipated. The amount of time needed to fully explore the feelings and ramifications was substantial. Yet it was crucial to provide sufficient time for the experience to be appropriately integrated by everyone.

Fifteen of the participants had been students of the Instructor in a previous class, and three others were taking another course from the

Instructor concurrently. The base of rapport and trust previously established significantly contributed to the students' opportunity to fully explore their reactions. Such a base was important in that it provided an environment in which students could be open and honest with their feelings.

Counselor Educators who contemplate replicating this activity must be certain that the experience will not cause the students to retreat into anger, defensiveness and fear. This means that those Counselor Educators will be required to exercise the emotional sensitivity to their students that they wish to develop in those students.

References

Festinger, L., A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957.

Otis, A. S., Otis Quick Scoring Mental Ability Test: Manual of Directions for Gamma Test, Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., New York, 1954.

OTIS QUICK-SCORING MENTAL ABILITY TEST

Score Report

Testee:_____

Date of Test:_____

Raw Score:_____ Converted I.Q.:_ _____

CED 633

OTIS QUICK-SCORING MENTAL ABILITY TEST

SUMMARY OF SCORES

Raw Scores	Converted I.Q. Scores
52	94
54	100
54	100
55	103
55	103
57	109
58	112
58	112
58	112
59	115
62	119
63	122
63	122
63	122
64	124
66	125
66	125
69	130
69	130
69	130
72	134
74	136
74	136
75	138
77	141

$\bar{X}$ = 63.44

Converted I.Q. = 123